

# **Continuity and change in stakeholder regimes: Reflections on methods and methodology**

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# **Continuity and Change in Stakeholder Regimes**

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## **ABSTRACT**

For many years, universities have been regarded as operating isolated from their socioeconomic and political environment. However, there is now a demand for universities to verify their relevance to society. This paper develops the research design for my dissertation, which focuses on continuity and change in stakeholder influence within Norwegian higher education institutions during the past 40 years. The paper elaborates on stakeholder regimes as means to study norms and structures for stakeholder influence over time. Historical institutionalism is explored as a method for explaining continuity and change – abrupt as well as incremental. Furthermore, methodological issues such as comparative case study design, policy tracing and document analysis are discussed.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Scholars generally claim that higher education institutions are characterised by stability and continuity (Larsen and Norgård 2002, Tight 2003). The higher education literature also claims that universities are changing and adapting. Terms such as the “entrepreneurial university” (Clark 1998), the “corporate university” (Bleiklie 1998), and the university as a “service enterprise” (Olsen 2005) illustrate such ability to change and adapt to new circumstances. Historical institutionalists claim that institutions may be both resilient and resistant. Furthermore, long periods of development are often characterised by apparent stability though there may be actual, albeit subtle and incremental change (Pierson 2004, Thelen 2003).

This paper outlines the research design for studying how and why norms and structures of stakeholder influence in higher education policy and practice change or remain stable. The paper uses historical institutionalism as its method for explaining not only abrupt change but also subtle and incremental development over 40 years, i.e. 1965-2006, in Norwegian higher education institutions. Norwegian higher education institutions are chosen because they are described as relatively stable even though the policy instruments have changed considerably over the years (Bleiklie 2000, 2005). This paper also presents a discussion of methodological issues relevant to the dissertation; it is a comparative case study of the University of Oslo and Telemark University College. The issues in focus are case study design, policy tracing, selection of cases and document analysis. In order to examine norms and structures for stakeholder influence, the presentation starts with a brief elaboration on stakeholder regimes.

## **STAKEHOLDER REGIMES**

Four stakeholder regimes, the expert, welfare, bargaining and entrepreneurial regimes, have been elaborated upon different governance models and stakeholder theory. These regimes are to be understood as ideal models in the Weberian sense. The purpose is to develop the regime categories as a theoretical framework to analyse how norms and structures might affect stakeholder influence.

Neave (2002) argues that the “stakeholder society” is something new. Higher education institutions are no longer autonomous collectivities but stakeholder organisations. This implies a change in power relations within and around universities and university colleges. The institutions are supposed to be more responsive to the needs of the stakeholders when it comes to doing research and education than they were before. But – is this really a new phenomenon? If not, what kind of stakeholder influence was there before this more commonly accepted “stakeholder society”? For this study, I argue in favour of applying stakeholder in a broader sense than what is done by Neave and others. Assuming that the institutions have related to various actors – or stakeholders – over the years, the same concepts and definitions need to be applied for examining the potential changing nature of this relationship during a more extensive period of time. In their study of stakeholding in higher education, Amaral and Magalhães take Freeman’s definition of the stakeholder as their point of departure and adjust it; a stakeholder is thus “a person or entity with legitimate interests in higher education and which, as such, acquires the right to intervene” (Amaral and Magalhães 2002:2). This implies that both internal and external stakeholders will be examined. Employees – both academics and administrative personnel – and students are internal stakeholders. The democratisation process in the 1970s may illustrate changing power relations given that more employees and students gained access to decision-making bodies. External stakeholders refer to actors that normally do not work in the institution in question. For the higher education institutions being publicly owned, the government is the main source of funding and thus an important external stakeholder. Other examples are regional authorities, local companies or other higher education institutions. Some of these may even have direct access to governance bodies as the non-universities have a long tradition of external representation on their boards. Furthermore, the academic community in the field of medicine, nursing, teacher training and engineering have long traditions for continuous dialogue with their professional associations. Consequently, they are here regarded as external stakeholders.

Norms are the first set of independent factors which presumably affect stakeholder influence. Norms can be understood as “collectively shared convictions” (Thelen 1999:375). The purpose of the higher education institutions, expressed as *cultural* vs. *utility values*, *the role of the state*, *the demands* which the institutions face, *the stance towards students* and

*reasons for autonomy* are aspects of the norms as they are applied in this paper. However, it is not the norms of everyone within the selected organisations that will be examined. Here, the focus is on how the organisation or each faculty as a whole presents itself to others.

The second set of independent factors concerns the structures of institutional arrangements in terms of both system-level governance and internal management and organisation. Governance instruments or tools, which aim to modify or change behaviour, constitute part of these structures. There are several examples of earlier research on policy instruments in the field of higher education (Bleiklie 2000, Larsen and Norgård 2002, McDaniel 1997, van Vught 1989). The following instruments will be applied: *treasury*, *authority*, and *internal organisation*. Another aspect of the structures to be discussed here deals with certain characteristics of the governance models presented by Olsen (2005:9) in his four visions of the university. These are the university as 1) a self-governing community of scholars 2) an instrument for national political agendas 3) a representative democracy and 4) a service enterprise embedded in competitive markets. The characteristics applied in this study are the *decision-making system*, and forms of *assessment*.

**Table 1:** Characteristics of the four stakeholder influence regimes<sup>1</sup>.

		<b>The Expert Regime</b>	<b>The Welfare Regime</b>	<b>The Bargaining Regime</b>	<b>The Entrepreneurial Regime</b>
<b>NORMS</b>	Cultural vs. utility values	Cultural	Utility	Cultural	Cultural and utility
	Role of the state	Protect HE from the outside world	Social planner - architect	Protect autonomy and academic freedom	Organise and supervise
	Demands on higher education	Serve the society as a whole	Implement public policy	Depend on the outcome of negotiations	Deliver services Open up to the outside world
	Stance towards students	Attain education and knowledge	Recipient, obtain a job	Participant	Consumer/ customer
	Reasons for autonomy	Authority to the best qualified	Delegated and based on relative efficiency	Negotiated - mixed bases for autonomy	Depends on the ability to survive
<b>STRUCTURES</b>	Treasury	Based on previous allocations (block grants)	Tied grants	Negotiated	Block grants and allocations based on performance
	Authority	Basic laws	Detailed laws and directives	Affected parties working out regulations	Basic laws
	Internal organisation	Decentralised – Chair-system	Centralised – Appointed leaders	Representative Elected leaders	Decentralised – Appointed leaders
	Assessment	Academic quality	Political effectiveness (input)	-----	Efficiency and flexibility – Performance control (output)
	Decision-making system	Decentralised system	Hierarchy	Segmented system – dialog	Market mechanisms and contractual coordination

<sup>1</sup> The content of this table is based on the previous discussion and the following literature; Gornitzka, 1999; Hood, 1983; Larsen and Norgård, 2002; Olsen, 2005; Schneider and Ingram, 1997; van Vught, 1989.

Cont.		The Expert Regime	The Welfare Regime	The Bargaining Regime	The Entrepreneurial Regime
<b>Foundations for stakeholders' influence</b>	Voting: (formal decision authority)	The Government (The Ministry) Professors	The Government The Ministry	The Government The Ministry Academic and technical-administrative staff as board members Students	The Government Academic and technical-administrative staff as board members Students External board members Accrediting agencies
	Economic:	The Government The Parliament	The Government The Parliament	The Government The Parliament	The Government The Parliament Local governments Assignors and clients/customers Other HE institutions as joint venture partners Students
	Political:	The Government Professors The Collegium	The Government The Ministry of Education	The Government Ministry of Education Management; academic and administrative Rector Students' organisations Trade unions Employers' organisations	The Government Local government Management; academic and administrative Rector Students' organisations National and foreign competitors Trade unions Employers' organisations

As an illustration, two of the four regimes, the welfare and the entrepreneurial, are given a more thorough description. The welfare regime is characterised by a centralised and hierarchical decision-making system. Furthermore, research and education are regarded as means of developing the economy and the welfare system. Consequently, utility is a key factor with respect to prioritising research and educational issues and deciding how science



can contribute to national goals. Funding is input oriented and given as tied grants; the role of the state is that of a social planner. State authority is also exercised through detailed laws and directives. Leaders are appointed, preferably by the Ministry. The entrepreneurial regime is, on the other hand, characterised by a decentralised decision-making system. Leaders are not elected but appointed, by either the management or the Board, which acts on recommendations from the management or some appointing committee. The role of the state is to organise and supervise the sector. Accordingly, both treasury and authority tools are designed to be general. Funding is given as block grants and may be linked to performance indicators. Regulation is ensured by basic laws, thereby giving each institution a certain room to manoeuvre and opportunities for local adjustments (Bleiklie, Frølich, Reppen and Aarre 1996, Hood 1983, Larsen and Norgård 2002, Olsen 2005). Compared to the literature referred to above, the norm dimension has to a greater extent been incorporated in the stakeholder regimes. Furthermore, all regime categories are made more explicit in order to make them more suitable for an empirical in-depth study. Finally, I have made presumptions about which stakeholders exercise voting, economic, and political influence within each regime.

According to Freeman, stakeholders have different foundations for their influence. These may be, respectively, voting, economic, and political (Freeman 1984). Voting influence refers to a relationship based on contracts and regulations and thus implies formal decision authority. Law regulates many aspects of institutional activity and management in higher education, even though what it regulates and to which extent varies over time. Employees, students and other stakeholders may have voting influence by virtue of participation in boards at institutional or faculty level or in other decision-making bodies. A stakeholder who can provide or retain resources has economic influence. Law formally regulates financial matters in the higher education sector, as do propositions to the Parliament and the central government budget. Political influence allows actors to use their status in negotiations that affect an institution's decisions (Burrows 1999). Political influence may on the one hand be formal; involved parties have the right to be consulted according to the Scandinavian cooperative tradition. On the other hand, it may take the form of more informal lobbyism.

## **HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONALISM**

Historical institutionalism is here used as a method for explaining continuity and change in stakeholder influence over the past 40 years. Here, I argue that higher education institutions are interesting objects – as political institutions – for studying continuity and change of stakeholder influence at the organisational level through several public reforms. From a historical institutional approach, the policy development is regarded as a process that evolves over time. However, the development, history, is not to be understood as linear but rather to move in loops (Hall 2003). Furthermore, the same forces do not necessarily produce the same effects in policy or practice in different countries, policy areas or organisations. These effects are assumed to be “mediated by the contextual features of a given situation” (Hall and Taylor 1996:941). Policy outcomes become a result of interacting historically embedded factors. Stating what makes the development take certain directions and whether it is characterised by change or continuity is important. This implies unpacking the historical patterns. Path dependence, critical junctures and punctuated equilibrium are important concepts for this purpose (Hall and Taylor 1996, Peters 1999, Thelen 1999). Applied to the University of Oslo and Telemark University College, this method gives the opportunity to study how these organisations have developed over time when it comes to adapting and interpreting national policy according to institutional conditions being active in each of the two cases and how it affects stakeholder influence. This implies using historical institutionalism at an organisational level – of which I have yet to find other examples. However, Torfing (2001) argues that state institutions are not the only relevant institutions to historical institutional research. The institutions have nevertheless to be able to define “the rules of the game of political cooperation and conflict” (Torfing 2001:295). The role of the state is to attend to general goals, which might be conflicting, in a policy field, e.g. higher education (Gornitzka, Stensaker, Smeby and Boer 2004). The same can be claimed to apply to higher education institutions, in this case Telemark University College and the University of Oslo, as public institutions<sup>2</sup>. Actors at both levels are affected by politically initiated reforms and policy changes. Furthermore, higher education institutions matter for defining and organising the actors’ behaviour. They may be regarded as institutional contexts (Maassen and Stensaker 2005), as do policy fields

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<sup>2</sup> *At least, this is mainly the case in Norway.*

which are the preferred point of attention for historical institutionalism. Moreover, higher education institutions, like other public organisations, may doubtfully be regarded as “neutral instruments for politically elected leaders” (Lægreid and Roness 1999).

### **Explaining Continuity and Change**

Path dependence refers to the idea that results and effects from earlier decisions become reproductive and self-reinforcing. The main idea is that earlier events in the policy process affect the solutions that are considered to be available later on (Peters 1999). Put differently, at time 1, the initial decisions are affected by institutions. At time 2, these earlier decisions are regarded as institutions and as such effect present policy decisions (Kay 2005, Skocpol 1992). According to the emphasis on positive feedback and self-reinforcement, policy development is characterised by continuity. Modifications may, however, be made. Increasing returns, or self-reinforcing sequences, involves the idea that an institutional pattern becomes more beneficial the longer it has been in place. Even if there are more efficient alternatives, transformation is more difficult as time passes (Mahoney 2000).

The forces of reproduction and self-reinforcement are involved in the concept of increasing returns<sup>3</sup> used by Pierson (2000, 2004), where actions are regarded as strategic and rational. A more adaptive action may lead to lock-in, i.e. some aspects may be captured in a trajectory. However, this is not to be understood in a deterministic sense implying that no other options exist. Instead, some options are simply ruled out due to earlier events (Wood 2001). Consequently, the sequence of events affects policy outcomes and institutional change and continuity. However, more recently published articles emphasise gradual and incremental change. According to Streeck and Thelen (2005:19), such transformative “[...] change is often endogenous and in some cases is produced by the very behavior an institution itself generates”. Change does not occur only when structure is defeated by agency. We can assume that actors constantly reinterpret and challenge rules that are not in line with their interests.

According to Thelen (2003), in order to explain what changes and what does not, mechanisms for institutional reproduction must be separated from those of institutional

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<sup>3</sup> In political science, this concept refers to returns on two kinds of investments: economic and credibility.

change. This paper makes the same distinction. Increasing returns, as part of path dependence, is an example of the former. The latter, gradual change may be possible through other causal mechanisms. Those of significance here are layering and conversion (Streeck and Thelen 2005). Change through layering implies that new arrangements are added to the existing ones. Former rules and structures are synchronised according to present normative, social, and political surroundings as adjustments are introduced by political actors. However, the core remains preserved (Streeck and Thelen 2005, Thelen 2003). The actors remain largely the same, while the context changes. Consequently, the trajectory may be altered over time. Change through conversion involves redirecting existing institutions towards new goals, functions, and purposes (Streeck and Thelen 2005). This process is started on the one hand when actors are confronted with new problems which lead to new objectives. On the other hand, new actors may come to power and turn the institutional frameworks toward (their) new objectives. For an old and traditional institution such as the University of Oslo, the rising demand that the institution is to open up to the outside world brings new challenges. Handling these challenges may result in new institutional objectives, starting a process that can be described in terms of conversion.

Historical institutionalism has been criticised for prevailing structure over agency. However, the adapted structure-agency relationship may be interpreted as in line with a critical realist approach – i.e. treating the relationship between the two as dynamic rather than dualistic (Hay and Wincott 1998, Marsh, Batters and Savigny undated). Structure is, however, regarded as the starting point. Assumingly, agents have the capacity to alter structure through a strategic learning process (McAnulla 2002). This is because actors are reflexive and able to react to their environment. Furthermore, actors interpret the structures and act upon them. However, the actors' capacity to alter the structures is affected by recourses – capital and knowledge about the environment – which are not equally distributed (Hay and Wincott 1998, Hay 2002).

## **Policy Process Tracing as Analytical Strategy**

Policy process tracing is here used as an analytical strategy, focusing on a sequence of events in the policy process. As an analytical strategy, it is somewhat similar to what others have called pattern matching (Bennett and George 1997, Yin 2003). The focus on sequence of events implies that multiple observations are analysed to recreate how the processes unfold (Hall 2003). George and Bennett (2005) describe policy tracing as a method consisting of two major characteristics. First, the study is to be structured according to theoretically deduced questions. These are posed in each case in order to standardise the data collection. This is to ensure that the obtained data are comparable. Second, it is a method of focused comparison. This implies that only certain theoretically relevant aspects of the selected cases are emphasised. Stakeholder influence is, on the one hand, analysed within one case over time (diachronic). On the other hand, it is a comparison of two institutions (synchronic). Put differently, all empirical analysis is based on the two sets of independent factors constituting the stakeholder regimes, norms and structures, which may imply changes in stakeholders' influence relations.

Historical institutionalism as a theory is based on the ontological understanding that political outcomes result from “[...] causal processes in which distant events, sequencing, and complex interaction effects play important roles” (Hall 2003:398). The causal mechanisms are not directly observable, i.e. physically, but may include different social processes such as information, purposes, beliefs, and interactions. Explanations built on causal mechanisms, however, reveal nothing about the strength of interaction effects. According to Mahoney (2001:580), causal mechanisms can be defined as “an unobservable entity that – when activated – generates an outcome of interest”. It is not a question about explanation in a strict scientific way such as, for example, estimating correlation through congruence tests (George and Bennett 2005, Thelen and Steinmo 1992). Correlation in itself is not enough for claiming causality. The emphasis is rather on the interaction between theoretically relevant factors. In order to connect variables and outcomes, observations of processes in empirical cases are important, not only values on the dependent variable. Moreover, it is pointed out that policy process tracing is extensively guided by theory in order to study the history underlying the outcomes (Hall 2003). The

stakeholder regimes elaborated above will function as theoretical guidelines. These regimes, i.e. different norms and structures for stakeholder influence, such as *utility* vs. *cultural values*, *demands*, *role of the state*, *stance towards students*, *treasury*, *authority*, and *internal organisation*, constitute the foundation for the empirical examination. Furthermore, policy tracing as strategy contributes to showing whether the causal mechanisms, layering and coercion, can link the explanatory factors and whether possible paths give any meaning (Mahoney 2003).

## **CASE STUDY DESIGN**

Historical institutionalists make extensive use of case studies. However, these case studies are not the type that analyses the effect of independent variables on a dependent variable (Hall 2003). In historical institutional analysis, the emphasis is on “the relationships and interactions among a variety of variables in a way that reflects the complexity of real political situations” (Thelen and Steinmo 1992:13). Consequently, explanations of the phenomena are made through a perspective that renders it possible to discover how the theoretically relevant factors are related over time.

The dissertation has the empirical objective of contributing to knowledge about stakeholders and their influence. The phenomenon will be studied at both a university and a university college. Still, the study is theoretically based. Data are interpreted within the theoretical framework of the four stakeholder regimes; the expert, welfare, bargaining, and entrepreneurial regimes, and the study queries whether the nature of the influence is voting, economic or political. Explanations of change and path dependence are elaborated from historical institutionalism. Accordingly, the research question is an explanatory how- and why-question. Case studies are considered suitable for this purpose. How things happen is important and requires closeness to actors and processes.

This study of norms and structures affecting stakeholder influence is carried out as a comparative case study comprising two higher education institutions. There is much debate about what constitutes comparative research. However, in the dissertation these institutions are not compared in a strict sense, i.e. applying either a most similar or a most different

system design – as described by George and Bennett (2005), Yin (2003), and others. The policy process tracing method offers an alternative to these forms of controlled comparison. According to Hall (2003), comparative method should be understood as a way of investigating causal processes in each case. Small-N comparisons allow in-depth analysis of the causal processes. The results from each case are contracted within a common theoretical framework (George and Bennett 2005). This study compares the development of the stakeholder regimes and stakeholder influence within two cases, the old institution of the University of Oslo and the more recently established institution of Telemark University College. Do we find the same or different causal mechanisms at work; do they differ over time – and if so, in what way? Furthermore, it would be interesting to examine how well the government has succeeded in making an old institution comply with national policy goals compared to the compliance gained in a relatively new institution. National policy is considered to be contextual to both institutions. Following the reasoning of historical institutionalism and path dependence, older institutions are assumed to be more resistant to change than more recently established institutions (Pierson 2004, Thelen and Steinmo 1992). It is therefore appropriate in this investigation to compare an old and a new institution. Furthermore, Oslo, being the Norwegian capital, does not need regional development. The University of Oslo is thus not expected to feel the need to interact with regional and local authorities or industry and business. For the university colleges, the context is different. Regional development was actually one of the political arguments for the initial establishment of regional colleges. Additionally, relatively new institutions are assumed to be more flexible and less crystallised in their thinking.

Generalisations based on qualitative case studies have met massive critique (George and Bennett 2005). Making analytical generalisations, i.e. going back to theoretical considerations, is more appropriate. The aim of the dissertation is to explain rather than simply describe a series of events. This case study focuses on two practices of the national policy and how they affect stakeholder influence at the organisational level. On the one hand, it aims to contribute by giving a rich, in-depth picture of Norwegian higher education policy and practice at the two selected higher education institutions. Moreover, it can also contribute to knowledge about a more general complex of problems, since it is a case which

studies national policy reforms and their effect on stakeholder influence at the organisational level.

### **Motivations for Selecting Studied Higher Education Institutions and Brief Case Descriptions**

The Norwegian higher education system is a binary system. The university sector comprises six universities and five scientific colleges. The latter are specialised higher education institutions with study programmes at the highest level in their fields, veterinary medicine, business administration, architecture, physical education/sports and music respectively. The non-university sector comprises twenty-five university colleges.

The scientific colleges are not relevant for this study. Their specialisation and the fact that they are not extensively multi-disciplinary institutions exclude them, even though several are old and presumably rich in tradition. The comparison of a university and a non-university is more interesting in terms of the assumptions of both historical institutionalism and stakeholder theory. These theoretical frameworks are the basis for the strategic selection of these two institutions. In the late 1960s, one of the goals for establishing the regional colleges was to contribute to regional development (Kyvik 1981). Presumably, several external stakeholders were thus exercising their influence from the very beginning. These stakeholders came from both local and regional authorities as well as trade and business. As for the universities, their objective was to serve general ideals of knowledge and decorum and to preserve knowledge and the knowledge community. Recently, however, their relevance has been questioned; they have been accused of being isolated from the outside world and expected to remedy this fault. Traditional universities have been assumed to be isolated from their surroundings; they are primarily concerned with cultural values. In accordance with these assumptions, and with reference to the discussion on stakeholder influence above, internal stakeholders are thus supposed to be the most important. Professors and other senior academics are the internal stakeholders with political influence and are invested with the authority to make formal decisions.

Several criteria have been considered when it comes to selecting one university (Oslo) and one university college (Telemark). The University of Oslo is the oldest and largest Norwegian university, established in 1811. It also offers the widest range of study



programmes and degrees. Today, it has about 30.000 students and 4.600 employees. The university has the following faculties: Theology, Law, Medicine, Dentistry, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Humanities, Social Sciences and Education. The University of Oslo has to relate to several faculties, departments, and disciplines. Not surprisingly, there are many, presumably conflicting objectives and interests to take care of and balance. Consequently, a university college with a wide range of academic subjects as well as vocational training would be a suitable object for comparison in this study. The non-university case selected for this study, Telemark University College, is located in the county of Telemark. It offers a broad range of vocational training and academic subjects at both undergraduate and graduate level. Today, there are about 4.900 students spread out on several campuses in the county. One of them also houses the Central Administration Services. The departments are as follow: Art, Folk Culture and Teacher Education, Art and Sciences, Health and Social Studies, Technology (Engineering). Changes are expected to be more incremental at the University of Oslo than at Telemark University College. As a merged institution, Telemark University College is quite young compared to the University of Oslo. Likewise, the different study programmes offered in the regional education system from the mid-1970s are relatively new. However, as institutions for vocational training – without higher education status – the regional colleges are definitely older.

## **EMPIRICAL DATA**

### **Documents**

To fulfil the empirical aims of the dissertation, the analysis is above all based on two kinds of documents. One is primary data. These documents may be understood as part of the studied phenomenon. First, there is a need to examine national policy with regard to norms and structures; the governance models and stakeholder theory outlined above, within the two cases as well as the political context. This will be done by studying national policy documents, i.e. commission reports, white and green papers and budget proposals. As reviews in higher education literature have shown, documentary analysis is also the dominant method applied in policy studies (Tight 2003). Secondly, archival records such as annual reports, board minutes, strategic and other planning documents are used. This is in

order to obtain information on how the University of Oslo and Telemark University College, respectively, have responded to national policy and governing tools, and e.g. who the actors actually were, what role they played and what norms they were guided by. One problem with this kind of documents is that many of them are written with certain recipients in mind, i.e. to show regulating authorities that national goals are fulfilled. However, using documents that are aimed at both internal and external recipients, e.g. case documents and annual reports, may to some extent help reduce the problem.

The analysis of different events and policies during this relatively long period does not rely solely on primary data. Secondary data are used as well, i.e. what other researchers and public commissioners have published that is closely related to the studied phenomenon, though covering shorter time frames than the dissertation. The contribution of the dissertation is thus the theoretical and methodological approach used not only on the primary data, but also on research already available. This also applies to the compilation of the entire study.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

How to study continuity and change in stakeholder influence in higher education? Here, four stakeholder regimes are developed – stemming from governance models and stakeholder theory. Stakeholder influence is to be investigated at one old university and one more recently established university college over a 40 year period in order to compare the evolvement and the causal mechanisms at work. In line with more recent literature on historical institutionalism, this paper claims that it may not only be a method for explaining continuity and discrete change but also continuous change. Furthermore, it is argued that the method may be applied at an organisational level given that the higher education institutions are able to define the rule of the game. The analytical strategy is based on process tracing for unfolding events and processes using mainly documents as sources of information.

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